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Worst could be behind Saddam's stalling

There should be little surprise that Saddam Hussein is still up to his old tricks. His refusal to allow U.N. weapons inspectors to perform their function because too many Americans are present is absurd. America simply has some of the best trained specialists in this extraordinarily esoteric field.

His delaying tactics ultimately serve his interests. Saddam's threatening rhetoric, and that of his henchmen, sometimes produces results. Nobody knows what he might do next. What are his capabilities? Prudent people fear and prepare for the worst.

Nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, known as "weapons of mass destruction," are cause for alarm. Americans especially should be concerned; the United States is Saddam's most likely potential target. He blames America for his defeat in the Gulf War; he may attempt to seek vengeance. How he might exact that vengeance is still unknown.

Media analysts continually refer to "Iraq's position" in the recent standoff. This is a mistake. There is one opinion that prevails in Iraq — Saddam's. Those who voice opinions opposing his are arrested, imprisoned, tortured and put to death. Those once brave souls now occupy shallow, unmarked graves in the Iraqi desert. It is not uncommon for Saddam to kill whole families as a lesson to others who might be inclined to disagree with his pronouncements on high.

Saddam is absolutely ruthless and without

mercy. In recent memory, Saddam has used chemical weapons to wipe out whole Kurdish villages in the north of Iraq; he continues his terror campaign against the Shia "marsh Arabs" in the south; and he has murdered members of his own family. Saddam has not grown kinder nor gentler with age.

Let's be perfectly clear. Saddam Hussein is a monster and a manipulative tyrant who has been directly responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. He attacked Iran, prompting an eight-year blood bath. He also attempted to build a cannon large enough to launch nuclear artillery rounds against Israel. More recently, he turned his savage appetite toward oil-rich Kuwait, precipitating the formation of an unexpected and successful U.N. military coalition of forces not seen since the days of the Korean War.

Saddam is a psychopathic megalomaniac who has maintained himself in power through the ruthless murders of thousands of his own countrymen. He controls an internal security apparatus that would have made the World War II Nazi Gestapo green with envy.

Saddam Hussein is not a politician. He is not a diplomat. He was never elected to office. And despite his penchant for strutting about in various military uniforms, he has not served even one day in his armed forces. He failed the Iraqi military's entrance exam.

Saddam first came to power because of his brutal effectiveness as an assassin, a skill he

has honed many times since ascending to power. His representatives in the Iraqi foreign military are merely frightened puppets. He is a mass murderer who will continue his killing spree until his own life is ended.

The cat-and-mouse game that has been unfolding in Iraq since the end of the Gulf War was perfectly predictable. Saddam will push the envelope at every opportunity. For all its positive qualities, the United Nations has never been particularly good at playing hard ball. Saddam will give up nothing to the inspectors except under severe duress. He is hiding something.

Bottom line: There is about a 90 percent certainty Saddam does possess stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons. He may even possess a rudimentary nuclear device, although hopefully not an accurate, long-range delivery means.

However, Saddam could be engaged in improving his capabilities in this area. He has never cooperated with U.N. weapons inspection teams, and he never will. If that doesn't scare you, it ought to. Saddam is buying himself time with his delaying tactics, but time for what purpose?

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